DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 265 625 EA 018 109

AUTHOR Wynn, Richard
TITLE Intraorganizational Conflict in Schools.
INSTITUTION Oregon School Study Council, Eugene.
PUB DATE Apr 78
NOTE 29p.; Revision of ED 137 984. Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Association of School Administrators (109th, Las Vegas, NV, February 27, 1977).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Collected Works - Serials (022) -- Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)
JOURNAL CIT OSSC Bulletin; v21 n8 Apr 1978

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Conflict; *Conflict Resolution; Educational Administration; Elementary Secondary Education; *Organizational Climate; Organizational Communication; Organizational Effectiveness; Problem Solving

ABSTRACT

There are no simple answers to the tricky business of managing conflict within organizations. Almost every conflict is a unique case with its own issues, participants, dynamics, and consequences. Still, it appears possible to differentiate between organizations that handle conflict productively and those that do not. Successful organizations view conflict in neutral terms, use conflict to energize leadership, leave conflict as stronger organizations, and develop systems for handling rather than ignoring conflict. Conflict can lead to several outcomes: deadlock, the victory of one side and defeat of the other, compromise, the integration of both points of view in a new solution, or a purposeful decision to sidestep the conflict altogether. Each of these outcomes is suitable to particular situations; none is appropriate to all; and some are more difficult to achieve than others. The characteristics that seem most positively related to an organization's ability to resolve conflict productively include having an open organizational climate; maintaining clear, accepted organizational goals and roles; establishing effective problem-solving mechanisms; keeping communication and feedback systems operating; equalizing power among internal groups; encouraging innovation; and developing cohesiveness and mutual trust among organization members. (PGD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

P. Piele

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

OSSC BULLETIN

ED265625

INTRAORGANIZATIONAL CONFLICT IN SCHOOLS

by

Richard Wynn

EA 018 169

Oregon School Study Council
Vol. 21, No. 8
April 1978

OSSC BULLETIN

INTRAORGANIZATIONAL
CONFLICT IN SCHOOLS

by
Richard Wynn
Professor of Education
University of Pittsburgh

(Paper presented at American Association of School Administrators Convention, February 27, 1977)

Individual copy—$2.00 ($1.50 if prepaid)
Discount of 10% for 10 or more copies

PREFACE

Conflict within school organizations can debilitate administrators, teachers, and students and leave all participants with a sense of defeat. Conflict can also energize higher levels of leadership and leave organizations stronger than before. The important strategy for management of conflict is the development of a climate that makes conflict work for the good of the organization.

Administrators and school board members will find in Richard Wynn's "Intraorganizational Conflict in Schools" a delineation of the characteristics of school climates that are conducive to productive conflict management. Dr. Richard Wynn is Professor of Education, University of Pittsburgh. He is co-author, with his wife, of American Education, which recently went through its eighth printing.

Appreciation is extended to Professor Wynn for making his study available as the April 1978 Bulletin of the Oregon School Study Council.

Kenneth A. Erickson
Executive Secretary
Oregon School Study Council

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Section		Page
I.	Introduction	1
II.	Some Propositions	2
III.	Outcomes of Conflict	7
	Avoidance	7
	Deadlock	7
	Victory-Defeat	8
	Compromise	8
	Integration	9
IV.	Characteristics of Organizational Climate Conducive to Productive Conflict Management	13
	An open climate	13
	Goal clarification and acceptance	14
	Role clarification and acceptance	16
	Problem-solving mechanisms	17
	Communication and feedback systems	17
	Power equalization	19
	Capacity for innovation	19
	Cohesiveness	20
	Trust	21

INTRAORGANIZATIONAL CONFLICT IN SCHOOLS

Public administrators have been caught in the cross fire of social conflict even before the assassination of Caesar. Although its intensity rises and wanes with time and place, conflict is endemic in public affairs, as any school administrator well knows. Conflict has forced some school administrators into early retirement and prompted others to become professors of school administration and teach others how to handle it.

There is no abundance of research on intraorganizational conflict and most of that which does exist focuses more on the analysis of the causes of conflict and the variables involved than upon the management of conflict. There are no simple answers to the tricky business of management of organizational conflict. Conflict resolution strategies that work in one case may be disastrous in another. So it is difficult to generalize about conflict management because almost every conflict is a unique case with its own issues, participants, dynamics, and consequences.

This paper is not a collection of guaranteed nostrums but rather a statement of some propositions about conflict which seem to differentiate between those organizations which handle conflict productively and those which do not. It will also suggest some management stratagems which seem to sustain these constructive organizational characteristics.

Conflict can be classified in several ways. March and Simon speak of (1) individual conflict, (2) interorganizational conflict, and (3) intraorganizational conflict. I have been asked to focus upon the last type, intraorganizational conflict, which takes place among various groups within the school system.

March and Simon define conflict as "a breakdown in the standard mechanisms of decision making so that an individual or group experiences difficulty in selecting an action alternative."[1] They also identify conditions necessary for intergroup conflict within an organization: (1) the existence of a felt need for joint decision making and either (2) a difference in goals or (3) a difference in perceptions of reality.[2]

Some Propositions

There are several propositions regarding intraorganizational conflict derived from the work of those who have studied this phenomenon. I refer to them as propositions, which are proposals to be considered, rather than principles, which are fundamental truths or accepted actions or conduct.

1. Conflict should generally be viewed in neutral terms. For most of us, and especially so for administrators who must preside over it,

---

[1] James G. March and Herbert A. Simon, Organizations, John Wiley and Sons, New York, 1958, p. 112.

[2] Ibid., p. 115.

some conflict is not a pleasant experience. Consequently, we are tempted to regard it as unfortunate, which indeed it often is. It may generate disorder, hostilities, anxiety, disruption, and even violence. But conflict always takes place within the context of interdependence of people or groups. Lippitt notes that this "system of interdependence has value for all parts of the system and if perception of the common values maintaining the system can be kept alive in all parties to the conflict, this provides a force toward creating some mutually satisfactory and acceptable resolution of the conflict, which in effect, means the improvement of the system."[3] He contends that "all individual growth and social progress involve rationally creative resolution of conflict."[4] Many scholars have noted that conflict and cooperation are inextricably intertwined in the life of any organization. Thus, if conflict and cooperation are two reciprocal processes or, as some have put it, two sides of the same coin, one must reason that some conflict is necessary in any viable organization. Almost every commencement speaker assures us that if it is a time of great turmoil, then it must also be a time of great opportunity. The evidence of history is on their side. Alfred North Whitehead observed that "the clash of doctrines is not a disaster, it is an opportunity." Most of our great advances have been achieved during periods of conflict. The examples are legion. They include the Morrill Act, which contributed so much to the democratization of higher

---

[3]Gordon Lippitt, "The Significance of Human Conflict," mimeographed paper, p. 2.

[4]Ibid., p. 1.

education; the Civil Rights Act; the Elementary and Secondary Education Act; the GI Bill; the generation of codes of student rights and responsibilities; and countless others. We do not say that all conflict produces social progress. Although ground may be lost in some conflict, the gains should outdistance the losses in any well-governed and well-administered school system.

I like Mary Parker Follett's definition of conflict: "a moment in the interacting of desires." This definition helps us view conflict without connotations of "good" or "bad" and to realize that conflict becomes good or bad only as a consequence of the level of civilization which people bring with their interacting desires. This neutral view is absolutely essential for both the study of conflict and the management of conflict. Indeed, the administrator who views conflict as inherently pathological, something to be avoided or muted, is in trouble right from the start. That administrator is likely to become part of the problem rather than a force in its solution.

2. Conflicts commonly energize higher levels of leadership. George Bernard Shaw noted that "the test of a man or woman's breeding is how they behave in a quarrel." Just as a ship's captain demonstrates his greatest skills in rough water, so school administrators face their most bracing tests in turbulent times. Think of the great presidents of our land and they are likely to be those who presided over very difficult times. Heroics are not possible without danger and leadership is not possible without change. Since conflict usually produces change, the capable leader has more opportunity to consummate change with conflict than without it. Indeed the subject of change in organizations can be

addressed with almost the same imperatives as the subject of conflict.

3. Conflict commonly leaves an organization stronger than before. It may also do the opposite. The destructive consequences of conflict are well-known; the productive consequences of conflict are not so well understood. Just as a sufficiently deep personality conflict within the individual may destroy one's ability to function, so a deep, protracted, and unresolved conflict within an organization can result in some destruction of the organization. We have all seen in some school systems the paralysis that follows deadlock in conflict. But Lewis Coser wrote a book, The Functions of Social Conflict,[5] pointing out the relationship between conflict and functions which are essential to the wholesome development of any organization. Among these are: the cathartic effect of releasing latent hostilities, examining divisive forces, clarifying ambiguous goals, integrating dissonant goals, reducing role ambiguities, refining policies and procedures, improving group structure, validating information or perceptions of reality, and many others. All lovers are aware of the euphoria that follows a patched-up quarrel. Conflict may also energize higher levels of motivation among people. We are often willing to work harder and sacrifice more during turbulent times than we are during tranquility. Franklin D. Roosevelt deliberately created a "web of tension" among his subordinates to release the motivation and creativity which he regarded as the lifeblood of successful administration. Perhaps he had read Mary Parker Follett's observation that "we

---

[5]Lewis A. Coser, The Functions of Social Conflict, The Free Press, Glencoe, Illinois, 1956.

can make conflict work and make it do something for us." To the extent that conflict is intelligently approached and fairly resolved, it may remove irritants, reduce misunderstanding and ambiguity, reinforce goals, quicken commitment, establish individual and organizational integrity, and otherwise refine the attributes of wholesome organizational climate. So it is not the conflict itself which should be alarming, but rather its possible mismanagement.

4. The essential strategy for conflict management is not the reduction of the incidence or intensity of conflict, but the development of an organizational climate and structure that are capable of making conflict work for the good of the organization. Obviously this is more easily said than done. If one accepts the three previous propositions, then one is persuaded that attempts to avoid or ignore or cover up conflict are not generally productive. If there is one prime lesson to be learned from the Watergate-related episodes, that is it. Instead, administrative response to conflict might better be the development of strategies that permit organizations to deal productively with conflict, rather than cover it up. Effective organizations are not those without conflict, but rather those that have found ways to make conflict work, make it "do something for us," in Mary Parker Follett's words. When conflict arises, the organization may respond either productively or non-productively. The quality of the response helps to shape the organizational climate either wholesomely or unwholesomely. This organizational climate then predisposes the organization toward either productive or non-productive syndromes when successive conflict occurs. This is the essential theme of the remainder of this statement.

Outcomes of Conflict

Bertram Gross, in his book The Managing of Organizations,[6] provides an excellent analysis of several outcomes of conflict: avoidance, deadlock, victory-defeat, compromise, and integration.

Avoidance

Avoidance is a necessary response to some kinds of conflict in certain circumstances. It is highly doubtful whether organizations could exist without some forms of avoidance of conflict. Withdrawal from conflict seems to be one of our most natural ways of responding to some conflict. We often rearrange situations so that antagonists may avoid one another. A student in constant difficulty with one teacher or school may be transferred to another. We do the same with teachers who can't get along with principals. However, attempts at avoidance of conflict are often counterproductive when we try to ignore irritations with the hope that they will go away. Clearly the option of avoiding conflict by ignoring root problems is one that administrators should use with great prudence.

Deadlock

Deadlock is another common outcome of conflict. In deadlock, neither side wins and both sides are frustrated. Deadlock can be accepted only when the dangers of defeat make a stalemate more palatable. Peace through stalemate may be more acceptable to both parties when the power of the

---

[6] Bertram M. Gross, The Managing of Organizations, The Free Press, Glencoe, Illinois, 1964, Vol. 1, pp. 274-279.

conflicting parties is approximately equal and when the issue is a fixed-sum issue. By fixed-sum issues, we mean those in which one side's gain must be at the other side's expense. A stalemate provides both sides with time to remobilize for renewed conflict.

Victory-Defeat

Victory and defeat are commonly outcomes of conflict, especially in fixed-sum issues. The victory-defeat outcome is the neatest and most unambiguous of them all. The issue is clearly and decisively resolved and administrators, like most of society, rather like decisiveness. We are all well acculturated to accept majority votes, guilty or acquittal decisions, arbitration awards, referees' decisions, or school board resolutions as binding. However, victory-defeat is also the most circumscribed form of outcome and therefore usually the least desirable outcome for losers, whose loss is total.

Compromise

This outcome is familiar to anyone who has engaged in the collective bargaining process. It has lots of allure in tough conflict because each party wins something and loses something. But as every negotiator knows, compromise requires people to behave deceptively. You must demand more than you expect so that when the difference is split you won't be losing too much. It forces you to obfuscate data and confuse communication. Compromise is deliberately deceptive and requires a kind of behavior that is alien to most educators and people of principle. Gross argues that overindulgence in compromise may lead to the erosion of moral values.

* * * * * * * * * * * * *

These outcomes of conflict--avoidance, deadlock, victory-defeat, and compromise--are well-known to us all. Although they are common outcomes of conflict, we can hardly regard them as real resolution of conflict because they almost always leave one or both parties frustrated and unsatisfied and they come back again on another day, as did the Germans following World War I to renew the fray, often with renewed vigor and power. The trouble with them all is that they fail to provide fundamental solution to conflict that is acceptable to all parties. In the case of fixed-sum issues, fundamental solution acceptable to all parties is often, but not always, impossible. If school enrollments are declining, some teachers may have to be involuntarily furloughed and not everyone can be happy with that outcome.

Integration

However, much conflict arises over variable-sum rather than fixed-sum issues. These issues lend themselves to the least-known, least-practiced, yet usually the most effective and enduring outcome of conflict. Mary Parker Follett calls it integration.[7] The concept can probably be best understood by illustration of an integrative solution to a conflict. In one school district, professional employees were entitled to ten days' sick leave with pay per year under certain conditions. The school board preferred to retain the limit at ten days, but the teachers were asking for thirty days. Avoidance, deadlock, or victory-defeat would all have

---

[7]Henry C. Metcalf and L. Urwick, (eds.), Dynamic Administration: The Collected Papers of Mary Parker Follett, Harper and Row, New York, 1940, Chapter 1.

resulted in either the retention of the ten days or the adoption of the thirty days. Compromise would have split the difference, perhaps at twenty days. However, in this instance, both sides listened and tried to understand the other. They both tried for a creative, integrated solution that would satisfy both sides as fully as possible. The result was a truly integrative solution. In brief, they agreed upon a policy of unlimited sick leave in which employees would receive full pay regardless of the duration of the illness or disability. The district would continue to pay the costs up to ten days for each teacher. A sick leave bank was established to cover cases in excess of ten days and a disability income protection insurance plan was adopted to cover extended periods of disability beyond those covered by the sick leave bank. The school district and the teachers shared the cost of this insurance. The new solution was better than the proposal which either party made in the first place. Teacher absenteeism was reduced as a result of the incentives provided through the sick leave bank. The school district's bill for teacher absenteeism was held approximately constant even though teachers now had full income protection for what amounted to unlimited paid sick leave.

Integration is then the most fundamentally satisfying mode of conflict resolution. It produces the most enduring settlements. It is at the same time often the most difficult mode. Both sides must trust each other. Each party must strive hard to understand and accommodate the other. Each party must strive to get behind the obfuscation and the hidden agendas and rhetoric and bring the fundamental "interacting desires" of both parties into the open. The process is akin to the "working through"

process in psychoanalysis. It requires repeated exploration of new and usually more complex and creative solutions that can satisfy both sides as fully as possible. It often produces solutions that are more difficult to administer. Barnard referred to this outcome as "moral creativity." A large measure of inventiveness, time, patience, and wisdom is required. But the outcome is usually worth it because both parties are more fully satisfied and the conflict tends to remain solved. Both parties are exhilarated by the solution. As Follett points out, the process of integrating divergent interacting desires as an essential part of developing the organization's power. The total power which an organization generates through integration is usually much greater than the power that the organization gains through either compromise or victory-defeat. We have learned that organizational power is not a fixed-sum which must be won or lost but, with integration, a variable-sum in which all can gain. That is why I have coined the term "collective bargaining" to describe this mode of problem solving.[8] But this is an uncommon concept that is neither well understood nor well pursued in many organizations. It should be remembered though that integration, like power, is a sword that can cut in any direction. It can unite the forces of the devil as well as the forces of angels. As noted earlier, not all problems can be resolved through integration, as Mary Parker Follett acknowledges. However, many conflicts can be resolved through the integrative mode. The following figure is helpful in distinguishing among those issues which can be solved through integration and those which can not.

---

[8]Richard Wynn, "Collective Bargaining," Phi Delta Kappan, Vol. 51 (April 1970), pp. 415-419.

Figure 1 - Dilemmas and their amenability to resolution by integration or victory-defeat and compromise

	ISSUES quantitative fixed-sum win-lose choices	PROBLEMS qualitative variable-sum mutual-gain choices
WELFARE GOALS satisfied through remunerative power resulting in calculative involvement	I high victory-defeat potential low integrative potential example: staff reduction	II moderate victory-defeat potential moderate integrative potential example: differentiated staffing
CULTURAL GOALS satisfied through normative power resulting in moral involvement	III moderate victory-defeat potential moderate integrative potential example: academic freedom	IV low victory-defeat potential high integrative potential example: student-faculty government

From Richard Wynn, Administrative Response to Conflict, Tri-State Area School Study Council, University of Pittsburgh, PA, 1972, p. 13.

Characteristics of Organizational Climate Conducive to Productive Conflict Management

We come now to the heart of the topic: what can we say to school administrators that may be helpful in the management of conflict?

I warned earlier that this paper would not produce a collection of nostrums guaranteed to resolve all conflicts. Such an approach to the topic is, to my mind, dangerous nonsense. The only approach which is meaningful to me is to examine those characteristics of organizations which seem to be related to productive resolution of conflict and to identify administrative behaviors that tend to reinforce these constructive characteristics. For the most part, they are administrative strategies that are compatible with Mary Parker Follett's concept of the integrative approach to the resolution of conflict. In this discussion, I have drawn heavily from the works of Mary Parker Follett, Matthew Miles, Gordon Lippitt, Chris Argyris, March and Simon, Amitai Etzioni, and Robert Owens.[9]

1. An open climate. Macaulay observed that people are "never so likely to settle a question rightly, as when they discuss it freely." Obviously an open climate is necessary for people to deal with conflict.

---

[9] Henry C. Metcalf and L. Urwick (eds.), Dynamic Administration: The Collected Papers of Mary Parker Follett, Harper and Row, New York, 1940; Matthew B. Miles, "Planned Change and Organizational Health: Figure and Ground," in Richard O. Carlson, (ed.) Change Processes in the Public Schools, Center for the Advanced Study of Educational Administration, Eugene, Oregon, 1965, Chapter 2; Gordon Lippitt, "The Significance of Human Conflict" mimeographed paper; Chris Argyris, Integrating the Individual and the Organization, John Wiley and Sons, New York, 1964; James G. March and Herbert A. Simon, Organizations, John Wiley and Sons, New York, 1958; Amitai Etzioni, Modern Organizations, Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1964; and Robert Owens, Organizational Behavior in Schools, Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1970.

Without it, people must attempt to hide and suppress conflict, which is not generally wholesome. Attempts to deny or suppress conflict lead to destructive modes of expressing and handling it. This justifies and reinforces the fears that lead to its denial and suppression in the first place. In closed climates, administrators tend to regard those principals or teachers who discuss the shortcomings of the schools as disloyal or unprofessional. Administrators may make a virtue of submission to established power relations on the assumption that power rather than wisdom makes right. Administrators may ask "Who started it?" rather than "What are the rights in the situation?" To the extent that collective bargaining forces conflict resolution behind closed doors, as it commonly does, it too may contribute to a closed climate. Conversely, we have seen in recent years a number of developments which tend to sustain open climates. These include sunshine laws, students' and teachers' right of access to their personal records, open agendas for deliberative bodies, grievance procedures, among others.

2. Goal clarification and acceptance. A common element in most of the literature on organizational conflict is the importance of reducing dissonance between the organization's goals and the goals of individuals or groups within the organization. People have been in dispute over the goals of schools ever since schools have existed and probably always will be and should be. Nevertheless healthy organizations are characterized by their ability to work toward reduction of goal conflict and goal ambiguity. I find that much of the conflict in schools arises over various means and that this conflict over means simply cannot be resolved until some consensus is reached with respect to goals. How do you feel

about differentiated staffing, MBO, PPBS, sensitivity training, ungraded school organizations, values clarification, open campus, and the like? These are all means which really cannot be considered sensibly until goals are defined and accepted. Several scholars have noted bureaucracies' tendency toward substituting consideration of means for consideration of goals and thereby encounter irreducible conflict. This results in the displacement of goals by means. The "publish or perish" syndrome on many college campuses is an illustration. Although we would all agree that professors should strive toward the goal of exemplary scholarship, publication is simply a means which may or may not be related to scholarly teaching and research. Although goal clarification is not always easy, it is nevertheless imperative if conflict is to become a productive enterprise.

In addition to goal clarification, the acceptance of the organization's goals by administrators, teachers, and students is also critical. The essence of both organizational productivity and the morale of teachers and students hinges heavily on the degree to which these people can accept the organization's goals as their own. Argyris calls it the "internatization" of institutional goals by the individuals within it. If I can satisfy my own needs dispositions with the same behavior that accomplishes the organization's goals, then I tend to be both productive and happy in my work. This integration of individual goals with organizational goals is obviously very germaine to Mary Parker Follett's concept of integration. I find systems applications to school administration one of the more promising stratagems for accomplishing all this. Every systems application begins with the definition of goals or objectives.

Nothing happens until goals are agreed upon. Then plans, programs, and budgets are derived from these goals and finally evaluation takes place strictly in terms of the stated goals. All systems applications tend to be highly goal-seeking in nature and therefore force attention of goal clarification. They also force us to move from the use of broad platitudes in defining goals and to choose only those goals which are appropriate and achievable. They also force us to consider the feasibility problems before we accept the goals. Management by objectives systems are also appealing because, if they are handled bilaterally, as they should be, they force attention upon the integration of individual goals with organizational goals. I would like to see the concept of management by objectives extended to <u>education by objectives</u> and include not only administrators but all employees in the system. Some of the best teacher evaluation systems that I have seen are really extensions of MBO to the work of teachers.

3. <u>Role clarification and acceptance</u>. People in organizations with non-productive climates often suffer from role conflict and role ambiguity. Supervisors are expected to help teachers at the same time that they are asked to conduct summative evaluation of the same teachers for administrative reasons. Superintendents are expected to be executive officers of the school board and the leaders of the professional staff. Principals are not sure sometimes whether they are an arm of management or principal teachers. Much of the interpersonal conflict in schools arises from role ambiguity and role conflict. This role conflict and ambiguity can probably never be entirely eliminated but it can be reduced through careful development of good job descriptions.

4. Problem-solving mechanisms. Conflict tends to be more productive in those organizations with well-established problem-solving mechanisms. Good management requires that these mechanisms be as close as possible to the problem at hand, which is to say that decentralized problem-solving mechanisms at the building level are important. This increases the schools' capability of sensing problems early and dealing with them close to the source of relevant information and action so that they stay solved with minimum strain and energy. Those statements are so obvious that they require little explanation other than a few reminders of what some of these problem-solving mechanisms may be. They include well-defined grievance procedures beginning at the building level. MBO can also help solve many problems. Administrative councils, student councils--or better yet, student-faculty councils--study committees and advisory councils are often useful problem-solving mechanisms. These collaborative approaches will not reduce the frequency of conflict. If they work well, they will probably increase the frequency and sometimes even the intensity of conflict. But productive-conflict organizations gain strength and credibility through their repeated use of successful conflict resolution machinery. Some people speak of this as the institutionalization of conflict management. These are all mediating mechanisms that seem to be useful in productive-conflict organizations.

5. Communication and feedback systems. How often we have heard in discussions of specific conflicts, "There's a communications problem here." Feeding more information to opposing parties is no guarantee that they will interact more lovingly, but to be ignorant of the opponent's perceptions of the problem or their expectations is often an

impossible handicap in resolving conflicts. Free access to relevant information is critical in resolving organizational conflict. Collective bargaining is often dysfunctional because it prompts secrecy and obfuscation of communication. Carl Rogers emphasizes that good communication is psychotherapeutic for both the individual and the organization. The whole task of psychotherapy is that of dealing with failure in communication. The emotionally maladjusted person is one whose communication within himself has broken down and, as a result, his communication with others has broken down too. The prime task of psychotherapy is helping the person restore good communication within himself. The prime task of maintaining organizational health is also that of restoring and maintaining good communication within the organization. Rogers believes that the major barrier to communication is our natural tendency to evaluate, agree, or disagree with statements of others. Real communication, according to Rogers, occurs only when we listen with real understanding and when we ask: What does this mean? Rogers says: "Each person can speak up for himself only after he has first restated the ideas and feelings of others accurately and to those persons' satisfaction." To do this takes courage because, in so doing, we risk changing ourselves.

I am distressed that more schools do not employ some of the more obvious modes of improving communications. Of course, we all have newsletters and bulletins and policy statements and job descriptions and they all help. But they don't permit the kind of understanding and interaction that Rogers was speaking of. Rap sessions, ombudsmen, morale surveys, organizational climate measuring instruments all permit people in the organization to "talk back to us." They give us the feedback which is

so important in early warning of latent problems as well as in testing the depth of our understanding of what people in the organization are thinking and saying, if we but give them the opportunity to speak while we really listen.

6. Power equalization. Unequal power equalization in organizations predisposes us toward resolution of conflict by victory-defeat or compromise rather than through integration. It is impossible to resolve conflict with justice if one party is holding a pistol to the head of the other. Conflict is often exacerbated if either party to a dispute must accommodate much heavier pressures than the other. For example, one of the great sources of discontent among blacks in attempts to reach racial balance in schools is that it is the black children who must usually be bused in greater numbers out of their neighborhoods into white schools. Collective bargaining has certainly brought better power equalization between employees and employers in schools. However, I suspect that in most schools students are still forced to accommodate toward teachers and administrators more often than teachers and administrators are forced to accommodate toward students.

There are a number of mechanisms that work toward power equalization. Productive-conflict schools have discovered and used them. They include equal representation and power in deliberative, problem-solving bodies such as student-faculty councils. They include due process protections from arbitrary actions. Codes of student or teacher rights and responsibilities are useful if they are developed multilaterally and administered fairly.

7. Capacity for innovation. We have said that productive conflict

resolution and change are closely related. Obviously an organization's capacity for change is related then to conflict management. This includes the organization's ability to invent new procedures, work toward new goals, and become more differentiated. As noted earlier, this capacity for creativity and innovativeness is essential to the integrative mode of conflict resolution. Studies of organizations always reveal that those corporations, public agencies, armies, even nations that survive and prosper are those that are capable of changing to accommodate new circumstances and expectations. Schools can increase their capacity for change through such stratagems as systematic exploration of future needs and stresses through devices such as the Delphi Technique; regularized brainstorming sessions; long-range planning; careful evaluation of present performance; systematic and periodic review of policies, programs, and procedures; deliberate rotation of membership on deliberative and problem-solving bodies; deliberate selection of more heterogeneous professional staff; zero-sum budgeting; research; viable inservice development programs; organizational development technologies; hiring cosmopolitans instead of locals; broken-front rather than solid-front program development which means abundant use of experimental programs; among many others.

8. Cohesiveness. Miles calls attention to cohesiveness as an essential characteristic of healthy organizations. Cohesiveness means the extent to which participants like the organization and want to remain in it and to influence it constructively and collaboratively. It is closely related to morale. If an organization is cohesive and morale is high, people will work hard and make personal sacrifices to solve

problems and keep them solved because they really care about the organization. If the organization is not cohesive, people are more willing to stand on the sidelines and observe conflict and perhaps even find satisfaction in watching administrators' heads roll and the organization immobilized and destroyed. Miles does not suggest that cohesive organizations have less conflict. They may have a higher incidence of overt conflict but they are confident that the conflict will be resolved constructively for the good of the organization. Deutsch speaks of this as "an alert readiness to be dissatisfied with things as they are and a freedom to confront one's environment without excessive fear, combined with a confidence in one's capabilities to persist in the face of obstacles."[10]

Cohesiveness is a natural byproduct of many of the management stratagems already mentioned, such as collaborative goal setting, planning, decision making, and evaluative bodies, but only if they function well. Cohesiveness can also be reinforced through intensified social interaction of people under certain circumstances. The administrative team may be one way of building cohesiveness among the administrative ranks in an organization. Building intraorganization coalitions against external threats can also strengthen internal cohesiveness but it can become a two-edged sword.

9. Trust. Finally, we come to the important matter of trust. We mention it last, not because it is least important, but because it should tend to follow naturally as a consequence of all the other wholesome

---

[10] Morton Deutsch, "Conflicts: Productive and Destructive," Journal of Social Issues, Vol. 25 (January, 1969), p. 21

characteristics of productive conflict organizations. If the climate is open, roles and goals are clear, if the problem-solving mechanisms exist and function properly, if communication is open and honest, if power is equalized, if the school has capacity for innovation and cohesiveness, and if one assumes a positive view of humanity, then most of the ingredients of trust are there. As Thoreau noted, trust is reciprocal and the best way to generate trust from others it to extend it ourselves to them.

* * * *

These then would appear to be the critical hallmarks of productive-conflict organizations: open climate, role clarification and acceptance, goal clarification and acceptance, effective problem-solving mechanisms, good communication and feedback, power equalization, capacity for innovation, cohesiveness, and trust. I cannot help but note in passing that collective bargaining commonly contributes little to any of these other than power equalization (as it relates to employees, not clients).

The concept of organizational health and its relationship to conflict are analogous to the concept of an individual's mental health and one's ability to cope with personal conflict. One might speak of organizational health in terms of applied mental hygiene. It is a crucial concept in increasing a school's ability to cope with conflict constructively. The mental health of people and their institutions is interactive and contagious. Schools are society in microcosm. Young citizens in a free society can hardly learn how a free society manages conflict and is strengthened by it unless they can see it happen in their schools.

In these times many people and institutions are not behaving well in quarrels. We can hardly criticize students' misbehavior in conflicts until teachers, administrators, boards, and citizens have become better exemplars of the integration of conflicting desires. Society has the right to expect us to behave well in quarrels, and we have the capability of delivering. We are by profession scholars of group process, problem-solving, interpersonal relations, organization climate, and mental health.

Both the essence and the high adventure of school administration in these times may rest more squarely with the civilizing of conflict in our schools than with almost any other definition which we can give to our work.

One final warning is imperative. It should be obvious that the school administrator, although an important variable, is only one variable in the milieu of conflict. I hope this paper does not suggest that school administrators should commit hari-kari if they cannot solve happily all intraorganizational conflict. There will be conflicts that cannot be resolved despite the most enlightened and vigorous and patient administrative behavior. So be it, as indeed it is in all organizations. In such instances I can only invoke that ancient maxim: Give me the serenity to accept that which cannot be changed, give me the courage to change what should be changed, and give me the wisdom to know one from the other.

OREGON SCHOOL STUDY COUNCIL
124 College of Education
University of Oregon
Eugene, Oregon 97403

Non-Profit
Organization
U. S. Postage
PAID
Permit No. 63
Eugene, Oregon